



SuperScript- STC Alberta News and Updates

Home

About STC Alberta
Awards/Scholarships
Edmonton
Contact Us
Competitions
E-mail lists
Event Calendar
Jobline
Membership
New Heights
Newsletter
Publications
STC Web Seminars

SuperScript is the official newsletter of the Alberta chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. We welcome your articles, feedback and questions to our [editor](#). The submission deadline for our next edition is **Thursday, July 1, 2010**. >>[Previous editions](#).

April-May 2010

President's Message

[Jessie Channey](#), *STC Alberta President*

We kicked off 2010 with our Annual General Meeting in January. For those who are wondering why we're not holding it in June, our fiscal year changed mid-2008, and with that, we've reorganized our events to match up. With a January AGM, not only are we able to get together in the New Year to find out how everyone spent their holidays, but we can review all the accomplishments of 2009, and kick-start the year at the same time.



- Completion of Website redesign proposal with a new WordPress website already coming together thanks to our new Web team: Brian Thompson and Janice Liwanag.
- The Alberta Salary Survey is the basis for a Canada-wide salary survey that Canadian STC President's are currently working on and will issue in Fall 2010.
- The SuperScript team is using a new tool, Constant Contact, to put the newsletter together.
- Jobline email notification system is seeing lots of activity with regular job postings coming in. If you're not receiving these notices, double-check your subscription settings by emailing our Membership Manager at membership@stc-alberta.org.

For a complete list of last year's accomplishments, see the AGM summary here: [AGM Summary2009.pdf](#)

Recently, we had our Working in Web program presented by Stephen Manktelow from Schlumberger Information Solutions and Lee Rempel of CityTV. They shared their experiences as web development contractors and engaged in a great question period at the end. We also had DITA 101 hosted by expert Sarah O'Keefe of Scriptorium Publishing Services. This webinar was graciously hosted by Lu Hall, Calgary's own DITA expert at CGI. Upcoming programs include Minimalist Documentation in both Edmonton and Calgary in June, as well as our premier event, New Heights, before we break for the summer.

Before summer, we'll be publishing our much anticipated Alberta Salary Survey. Once ready, we'll send out a notification on our mailing list. From there, you'll be directed to the members-only area of the website. To ensure that you've got access to our members-only area, be sure that your membership included the Alberta Chapter. We recently asked STC to allow people to add the Alberta Chapter using email notice, instead of the usual procedure of filling out a PDF form and mailing it into their USA office. If you are interested in upgrading your membership, just let me know (president@stc-alberta.org) and I can connect you with someone who can get you signed up immediately.

To learn more about which events are coming up, see our Event Calendar [here](#).

Following on our chapter social media survey, you can also look forward to seeing STC Alberta make greater use of these tools in the near future. Stay tuned!

New Heights

[Melissa Ruryk](#), *New Heights Manager*

Learn to Write for Instructional Design: An Overview Workshop for Technical Communicators



You picked it - we've got it! Join the growing world of instructional design and online learning.

- Tap into increasing opportunities with the global shift toward lifelong and adult learning.
- Learn best practices for designing training course materials, tutorials and more from a recognized industry leader.
- Understand how you can easily leverage your existing TC strengths and experience to step into this field and increase your personal organizational value. You might even find a new career direction by adding this to your "toolbox."

Don't miss out! [Register today](#).

[View Full Workshop Details](#)

Upcoming Events

Minimalist Documentation

June 2, 2010, Edmonton | June 3, 2010, Calgary

In this evening program, Bernard Aschwanden of Publishing Smarter summarizes ideas from a two-day course on Minimalist Documentation (and yes, Bernard is aware of the irony of a two-day course on minimalism). Geared towards people who need to reduce the volume and complexity of content, Bernard provides a top ten list you can follow to cut time and effort needed to reduce the volume, and improve the quality of what you create. [More information...](#)

New Heights

June 4, 2010 | Calgary

This year's New Heights seminar on the topic of Instructional Design will be presented by Bernard Aschwanden, professor in the continuing education Technical Communications program with Seneca@York, and founder and president of Publishing Smarter. This event promises to be engaging and educational for writers who create (or are interested in creating) course materials, tutorials, and other instructional content. [More information...](#)

All Associations Bar-B-Q

June 9, 2010 | Calgary

Last June was the inaugural All Associations Bar-B-Q. It included a tour of the new SMART Technologies building, networking to the live tunes of The Dirge, and a fundraiser for the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. The initiative was created to be an inclusive event to bring the various industry groups together and form relationships for future collaborations. Now get ready for the second annual, All Associations Bar-B-Q on the patio of Big Rock Brewery. Stay tuned for registration details.

Technical Editing SIG Watercooler Chat: Strategies for Simplicity

June 9, 2010 | Online

You may or may not have attended the STC Technical Communication Summit in Dallas. Either way, you won't want to miss our June Watercooler chat, "Strategies for Simplicity"! Andrea Wenger, fresh from presenting this topic as an item at the 2010 SIG Progression at the Summit, will be moderating

this online event. This event is for Technical Editing SIG members only. This online event will be held June 9 at 11:00 - 12:00 ET. [More information...](#)

STC Alberta's 30th Anniversary

September, 2010

This year celebrates our 30th year representing Alberta technical communicators. Stay tuned for more info on our 30th anniversary celebrations!

XML Basics

October 21, 2010 | Calgary

Presenter Peter Zaborski will be discussing the basics of XML including syntax, schemas, the difference between XML and HTML. More details to follow closer to the program date.

Edmonton's "Happenins"

[Deanne Wilson](#), *Edmonton Liaison*



Edmonton may have a relatively small group of members compared to Calgary, but we're an active group. We've had two coffee nights so far this year and have had our greatest turnouts at these two events!

In February, we met at the Second Cup next to Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC). New and seasoned

members had a chance to visit and socialize. We even had a couple of non-members come out to "test the waters." This was a strictly social networking event, but members and non-members alike had a chance to meet new people and make new connections. It was great to see some familiar faces, as well as some new ones. Let's keep up the momentum!



In mid-April we had another gathering of Edmonton folks that was also a great turnout. This time we met at Good Earth Café on the University of Alberta campus. We had scheduled 45 minutes of socializing and networking to be followed by an hour of announcements and discussion of the (in progress) strategic plan, which was being revealed.



Since we had a number of new members again, we started off with everyone introducing themselves. Introductions were followed by a couple of announcements. The first announcement was to let everyone know that plans were underway for the STC Awards ceremony to be held at Grand MacEwan University Centre for the Arts. This ceremony is to celebrate the winners of the awards that are granted to three students enrolled in the Technical Communications branch of the Bachelor of Applied Communications in Professional Writing program. The date has been set for May 25.

The second announcement was to let everyone know that Bernard Aschwanden will be coming to Edmonton to present an evening program for us prior to heading to Calgary, where he will do a repeat of the evening program and then do a full day workshop at our New Heights seminar. Bernard's topic will be on Minimalist Documentation. The date for the Edmonton event is June 2.

Unfortunately, just as our discussion of the strategic plan was about to start, an employee of the café announced that they were closing early. As a result, we cut the discussion short and simply did a quick run-through of the plan and had time for only a few questions. Overall, the strategic plan was well received and everyone liked the idea of developing some structure and plans around our events.



The strategic plan was developed by a group of Edmonton members with the assistance of one of the students in the Tech Comm program at Grant MacEwan University. Thanks to everyone for your

input and for taking time out of your personal lives to help out with this great project.

The strategic plan has been forwarded to the STC Alberta Administrative Council for review and discussion and, when finalized, will be made available for all members to read.

Keep your eye out for your invitation to the awards ceremony and check out the [Event Calendar](#) for registration information for the evening program with Bernard Aschwanden!

In Search of Alberta DITA Users

[Jessie Channey](#), *STC Alberta President*

After our March DITA webinar (see past events section below), we got curious about how our local market is adopting DITA, if at all. We knew that our webinar host, CGI, was definitely loving DITA, and our Edmonton Liaison's company GE Fanuc was getting up and running. So who else in Alberta is using DITA? We asked our members to tell us and so far we've only heard of Intuit. If you know of anyone else, let us know!

What Social Media Tools Do You Use?

[Jessie Channey](#), *STC Alberta President*

25 people replied and nearly everyone that is using some form of social media is also using many of these tools together. Here is a breakdown of the results:

Facebook - 80%

Facebook appears to be the most popular social media tool amongst STC Alberta members. Most Facebookers indicated they liked to keep their personal and professional networking separate. Main motivation is to keep in touch with family and friends.

LinkedIn - 72%

Nearly all people using LinkedIn are using it for professional purposes only. Most were invited by others to join. People reported it was an easy way to stay in touch with former colleagues.

YouTube - 68%

Many people use YouTube to watch missed TV shows, music videos, or to get guidance with a task. No one reported posting a video.

Twitter - 40%

Those who are signed up to Twitter have done so mainly so they can follow others who are doing the messaging. No one reported posting messages.

MySpace - 12%

This one received plenty of negative commentary: From being messy and outdated, to being downright hated.

None - 8%

Other

Broad as the definition is for social media, so are the tools available for connecting: from industry specific tools such as "PitchEngine" for Public Relations professionals, to tools like Facebook that bring out all age groups for a variety of purposes. Some of the common "other" tools reported include: Photobucket, Flickr, Buzz, Skype, and Slideshare.

In addition to my informal survey, there's another one set up by STC's Technical Editing SIG on LinkedIn. It's open to all LinkedIn Members who have joined the STC Technical Editing SIG [here](#).

If this topic has you interested in learning more, our fellow Member Mitch Willis has created a [document](#) outlining how to get started with LinkedIn and Twitter. (Thanks for sharing, Mitch!)

And thanks to everyone that participated.

Why Social Media Is So Wonderful

By Rich Maggiani, Fellow

Originally Published in March 2010 [Intercom](#)

What is it about social media that is so intriguing? Is it the possibility of communicating with someone halfway around the world, befriending someone you have never met, discovering people you might never have known, sharing intimate details of your life and learning the same about others, conversing with a large number of people all at once, all of whom share a common interest? Or is it simply being enlightened about new thoughts and ideas, discovering new horizons, and boldly going where you could never have gone before? As it turns out, it's all of these reasons and much more. I'm just enthralled with social media, as are many of you. In fact, I asked a number of colleagues to share their thoughts on social media. Some are from New England where I live, a few others scattered across the United States and Canada, and a couple from around the world; some older, some younger. They had a lot to tell me.

So here, for your edification, enlightenment, and enjoyment, I present a treatise on social media and its role in communication.

Is Social Media Preferable to Face-to-Face Communication?

Social media enables you to broadcast your messages to a larger audience, not just a single person, in an electronically social manner. You can:

- easily start a dialogue or a group discussion
- use services like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook
- use blogs, wikis, and other collaboration tools
- post photos, audio files, and video files

Social media allows you to interact with thousands of people who share similar interests regardless of time, distance, schedule, language, position, or experience—people you do not know and would never know. This is simply not possible with face-to-face communication.

Social media is especially well suited for one-to-many communication, something that is more difficult in face-to-face communication even when such a situation is scheduled ahead of time. Social media allows you to send your message to a select group of people, either a group that you invite or a public group that any interested party can join. You can also monitor the messages of these groups or other groups simply because you find them interesting. You can participate or just listen and learn. In this way, social media is a powerful method of communication.

“Online interactions offer the potential for asynchronous conversations that transcend both time and location,” notes [Tom Johnson](#). Social media is asynchronous: when you are ready to send out your message, you do it. Those receiving your message can listen to it—or not—when it is convenient for them. Face-to-face, on the other hand, is synchronous: you can only send out your message when those receiving it are physically present.

Through social media, you focus more on the person—what they say, who they are—than on physical indicators of looks, dress, nationality, and other factors that tend to create judgments and perceptions. That's a good thing.

Unfortunately, you cannot focus on some extremely valid communication indicators such as body language, tone of voice, and inflections. That tends to mislead sometimes.

In addition, social media offers an archival, historical, searchable record, something that face-to-face communication cannot provide.

For some, face-to-face interaction is more efficient; for others, social media is preferable. While I prefer face-to-face, real-life interactions, that is not always possible. In fact, it is rarely possible since many of the people I communicate with do not live anywhere near me. In fact, I have no idea where some of them live. With social media, that physicality is not necessary. You send out your message and people respond if and when they want.

Social media is immediate communication without borders. Social media is exponential and viral, allowing people to pass along messages to an ever-growing circle. Telephones and email didn't replace face-to-face communication, so social media will not either. Social media isn't necessarily

preferable to face-to-face interactions, it's just another method of communication (albeit one that alters the landscape considerably).

Some People Prefer Social Media

Social media allows you to keep in touch between those times when you can actually meet. And during that time, you can build a more solid relationship with strong and constant communication; then there isn't so much catching up to do when you do meet. You can even build relationships with people you have never met, and probably never will. I meet a number of people every year at the STC annual conference. I then see many of them a year later at the next conference. In between, social media allows us to keep in touch.

You can carry on conversations using social media, just as you might while sitting around a table. Indeed, you can enrich a conversation with social media. There is no constraint of time and space—you can contribute at any time, from anywhere.

Some people use social media to communicate with colleagues who sit just down the hall at work. Why? It's concise and succinct, and eliminates the need for small talk. (I, on the other hand, enjoy small talk, as it gives me the opportunity to widen the conversation to more engaging and revealing topics. Besides, I get to watch body language and facial expressions, gauge gestures, make eye contact, listen to intonations, and feel someone's presence. All of this is missing in social media.)

Some people are simply better at communicating in writing, photographs, video, or audio. For them (introverts, I'm calling your name), communicating through this media feels effortless. As such, social media levels the playing field for introverts. "I would rather a sharp stick stuck in my eye than make small talk at a public event, but I can be very gregarious in social media," says [Rahel Bailie](#).

"There's a certain 'push' to the technology," states [John Hedtke](#). You wouldn't call someone at 11 in the evening, but you can certainly contact them through social media. And if they happen to be online, you can have a synchronous conversation.

Finally, people prefer social media because they can control the level of intimacy and reaction time. As [Sherry Michaels](#) notes, "I know people who text instead of calling because it allows the arm's length to think through issues before responding." You don't need to be spontaneous; social media allows you the time to be thoughtful.

How People Act in Social Media Settings

Social media has opened a rich electronic communication experience, so people are much more open. "By integrating text, photos, and video to a targeted audience, I see a tendency to share more information in richer formats than would ordinarily be shared with that same social set," opines Lori Fisher. "'Social weather' is more difficult to discern in social media settings than it is in the real world," says [Anne Gentle](#). For example, consider a five-star restaurant replete with white table cloths and a live harpist playing softly.

With some rudimentary auditory and visual observations, you would know how to act. When you enter a forum or other social media setting, the process isn't as obvious. You must observe for a while and read quite a bit before accurately interpreting the social weather for that particular forum. Then, you can participate at a level that everyone else expects.

Understanding that there is another person reading your message is sometimes forgotten. That happens when people are too bold or cutting with their messages, or simply not careful with how their message is crafted. Tone is inferred when none was intended. As a result, people are insulted and offended, rightly or not. Repair can oftentimes appear disingenuous.

Anonymity can also be a problem, with people hiding behind an alias rather than their true identity. Age, gender, and true intentions are easily masked. This contributes to a release of pent-up hostility and becomes exacerbated on blog commentaries and forums. Social media becomes a tricky medium under these highly emotive circumstances. Even something written in jest can easily be misinterpreted. While there is great opportunity in social media, there is also great danger in miscommunication.

As [Char James-Tanny](#) points out, "The world is listening, even to your 'private' conversations." Social media messages and conversations are permanent. Everything that you post is stored on a server

somewhere on the planet and is easily retrieved through search engines.

Social media presents an incredible communication opportunity in which the world is your audience. You can meet all sorts of people from all walks of life who share a common interest. What you write can quickly traverse the planet. You expand your horizons and gain a global viewpoint.

Two Aspects of Social Media Relevant to Tech Comm

Ben Minson via [Gryphon Mountain](#)

I'll admit it: I'm not huge on social media, particularly where they intersect with technical communication. I'll clarify that statement. I use Twitter, I have this blog, and I have a LinkedIn profile. But I don't use Facebook, Digg, or anything else. I've only recently investigated using a wiki for a support site with one of the projects I work on.

I think a major reason that I haven't gotten excited about using social media in tech comm is that no one has shown me or explained to me specific techniques that I can use and how they can be effective. No one has provided me a list of criteria I can use to determine whether a particular project would benefit from a social media strategy as far as user assistance goes. If there's something like that out there and you know about it, please point me to it.

I'm interested in having things like a weekly tip blog. Part of the trouble that we have in our organization is that the technologies that social media usually run on—such as PHP and MySQL—aren't supported by our infrastructure group at this point. This makes a long-term strategy difficult because people change positions, so an application service engineer who volunteers to support your wiki at the beginning may not be around to do so in a year.

I see the concept of social media in tech comm as involving two parts.

1. User-Provided Content

Many tech writers are probably averse to this part of social media in tech comm, or at least many were when this idea emerged. We fear the threat of:

- Disorganized information
- Inaccurate information
- Bad writing

I don't think a magic solution to this problem exists. If you have an entire documentation team, someone could be responsible for monitoring the user-generated content. But the ability to do this either as a team or as a lone writer depends on the amount of information you're dealing with and how many people are contributing, among other things. However, if social media and user-generated content are wrapped in with the overall doc strategy, then it can be accounted for and balanced out with the regular writing.

I'm talking mostly about wikis here, but suppose you had guest posts on a product blog by enthusiastic users. Someone has to edit that kind of thing.

2. Conversation and Relationships

If your organization is interested in interacting with customers and even developing relationships, social media and tech comm are probably a good way to do this.

Currently, I use release notes as a way to keep customers and users informed, a way to say, "We've heard you report these problems, and here's how we're doing on them." These notes are only part of a conversation, though, and so aren't a dialogue in and of themselves.

Blogs and forums are great avenues for informing people about changes to products. Twitter, and yes, even Facebook, are other avenues. I'm not talking marketing, but helping the customers and users better use the products by giving them assistance through these vehicles. Using these methods, where users can give feedback, can build their trust and loyalty. Giving them assistance in a space where they can ask questions and get more information on demand can build trust and loyalty. But only if it's done sincerely. People can tell when you're not actually listening, in person or

otherwise.

Wrap-Up

I work in an organization where people are accustomed to one-way communication flow, so they don't engage in conversation much when communication comes from headquarters. I think this culture can get in the way of innovative collaboration, which is something we're encouraged to develop among our teams and groups, both as leadership and as individual contributors. I think people are gradually coming out of this mindset. Perhaps as it changes, we'll get more official support for social media technologies and find it easier to incorporate these media into technical communication here.

I'd love to see a method for analyzing an audience and deciding which social media would be effective for engaging them. I don't have the expertise to put it together at this point. If you're aware of something like this, let me know.

Bitter Ink

[Jeremy Schroeder](#), Guest Contributor



Used with permission.

About the Author:

Jeremy Schroeder created Bitter Ink way back in 1999 for STC Alberta as a favor for a friend, Jessie Channey. For more laughs (and commiseration), please visit his new [website](#).

Past Events

DITA 101

[Jessie Channey](#), STC Alberta President

On Tuesday March 9, 12 of us gathered in downtown Calgary to connect to the DITA 101 Webinar co-hosted by STC Phoenix and STC Alberta. DITA expert, Sarah O'Keefe of Scriptorium Publishing, delivered the presentation outlining what DITA is and how it works. After the webinar, we engaged in a conversation led by our hosts who are using DITA for their company's documentation. Special thanks to Lu Hall at CGI for volunteering their facilities (and a door prize) for this webinar.

Slides from the presentation are available [here](#).

[Working in Web: A Technical Communicator's Toolbox for Web Development and Design](#)

[Jennifer Burgess](#), *SuperScript Editor*

One of the first STC Alberta spring events was an informal workshop lead by two up-and-coming local web experts. Several of Calgary's most hard-core technical communicators braved the storm and contributed to a lively and informative discussion.

New Members

[Raylene Hawrysh](#), *Membership Manager*

We had eight new members join us since the last issue:

Harmit Brar
Sandra Hammerlindl
Kristen Sabo
David Withington
Susan Zanewick
Shanna Graham
Suzanne Robinson
Florence Ross

Welcome everyone!

If you would like to recommend a friend or colleague to the benefits of STC, encourage them to review our website, particularly our profile under About STC Alberta. Better yet – pass along this edition of SuperScript for their reading pleasure, and invite them to join you at our next program night!

STC Election Results 2010-2011

[STC Office](#)

STC is pleased to announce the results of its 2010 election. Online voting concluded at noon EDT (GMT-4) on 8 April 2010. Paper ballots had to be received by that date to be counted as valid votes. Of 5,226 eligible voters, 729 (13.95 percent) cast ballots.

STC's bylaws, adopted by the membership in August 2007, no longer require the officers in STC's presidential chain of succession—the incoming president and incoming first vice president—to stand for election. Therefore, incoming president Michael A. Hughes and incoming vice president Hillary Hart did not appear on the ballot this year.

Congratulations to the winners, and a special thanks to all candidates for their dedication to STC and willingness to devote their time and energy to improving the Society.

President
Michael A. Hughes

Vice President
Hillary Hart

Secretary
Rachel Houghton, 374

Nominating Committee: (two positions)

Nathaniel Lim, 393
Linda Mikkelsen, 317

Directors: (two positions for a 2-year term; one position for a 1-year term to fulfill the remaining year of Lisa Pappas's term)

Nicoletta A. Bleiel (2-year term), 457
W.C. Wiese (2-year term), 411
Tricia Spayer (1-year term), 306

Quotes & Quips

[SuperScript Editors](#)

"I hear YouTube, Twitter and Facebook are merging to form a super-social media site - YouTwitFace." - Conan O'Brien, The Tonight Show, June 2nd, 2009.

"Privacy is dead, and social media holds the smoking gun." - Pete Cashmore, Mashable CEO

"Being the first is old media, while being to the point is new media. And Twitter never forgets." - Mercedes Bunz

"The promise of social media lies not in self promotion, but in self-actualization" - [@briansolis](#) via Twitter

Links Compilation

[SuperScript Editors](#)

The following is an assortment of information of broad interest. Please feel free to send more great finds to newsletter@stc-alberta.org.

STC

- [The Technical Communication Journal Website is Now Live!](#)
- [Webinars for May 2010](#)
- [Summit and Social Media: Twitter, ScribbleLive, and More](#)
- [2010 Summit Wrap-up](#)

Technical Communication

- [Joe Welinske gives presentation about user assistance trends, tools, and technologies](#) (See *Contents* sidebar)
- [Ten things you thought you knew about writing](#) (See *Contents* sidebar)
- [Prototyping: Picking the Right Tool](#)
- [Translation in China as a Form of Technical Communication: Rethinking Social Roles of Technical Communication in the Current Political and Economic Contexts in China](#)
- [Why You Shouldn't Write for Other Writers](#)
- [The Evolution of Usability Tests](#)

Other Professional

- [Designing with the Elements of Play](#)
- [Please Rob Me: The Dangers of Online Oversharing](#)
- [Developing a Departmental Style Guide](#)
- [Huffington Post: Audiences Don't Pay for Content](#)
- [Linking to media articles](#)
- [The Speed of Thought](#)
- [Why Social Sharing Is Bigger than Facebook and Twitter](#)
- [Enhance your writing career by improving your verbal communication skills](#)
- [9 years as a hired gun, 9 aphorisms](#)

Fun

- [Tech writing and procedures in movies](#)
- [A tax form for the marginally employed](#)
- [For the editors](#)
- [Tricky Grammar: Interrogative Pronouns](#)
- [Oxford Word of the Year 2009: Unfriend](#)

Submitting to SuperScript

[Jennifer Burgess](#), *SuperScript Editor*

We love including articles and ideas from chapter members in SuperScript. Submit comments, articles and questions to newsletter@stc-alberta.org.

Advertise to Our Members

[Jennifer Burgess](#), *SuperScript Editor*

Target your advertising to our entire membership base for reasonable rates. Contact newsletter@stc-alberta.org for more information.



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